



Envisioning Our Future

Lanesboro: The Best Small Town in the Midwest

Some communities wait for the future to happen to them. Lanesboro is not waiting. Lanesboro is leading the way, designing and realizing its own best version of itself.

Over the past few years Lanesboro has devoted time, energy, and funds to developing a collective, inspired vision of its future. The process of articulating *Lanesboro 20/20* has galvanized community members—neighbors all—imbued with a generous collaborative spirit and tremendous enthusiasm. It has also revealed an innovative, smart, and entrepreneurial group of people with multitude perspectives, committed to working together to envision their common goal: Lanesboro will be the best small town in the Midwest.

Lanesboro 20/20 has been a process of engaging community members in envisioning their future. Citizens engaged in multiple forums in which their ideas and opinions were heard, seriously considered, and incorporated into a plan built on consensus. The tremendous energy and spirit of the Lanesboro community is evident throughout *Lanesboro 20/20*, ready to be harnessed in implementing our future long before the future happens to us.

Background

In 2003, the Lanesboro Area Chamber of Commerce formed a Community Initiatives Committee, charged with articulating a vision for Lanesboro in the year 2015. Two years of meeting nearly every six weeks resulted in the completion of several community-enhancing projects: downtown beautification, the formation of a welcoming committee, and an effective “Today a Guest; Tomorrow a Neighbor” postcard to recruit potential new residents. In 2005, when it became clear that wider city involvement was the necessary next step, the Community Initiatives Committee handed off their responsibilities to the Lanesboro Economic Development Authority (EDA), who took the leadership baton and ran with it. The EDA hired a planning coordinator, and requested a plan for future growth that focused on housing, economic development and land use. This became *Lanesboro 20/20*. The planning process offered an unprecedented opportunity for people with diverse interests and opinions to create carefully and with imagination the sort of community they would all like to live in—a place to love, and a place to leave as a great gift and legacy for all who follow.

The Process

The *Lanesboro 20/20* process involved the following:

- A community kick-off and brainstorming meeting in March of 2006
- The application and award of a community-building grant from the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation
- A community-wide paper and on-line survey
- Three smaller community meetings to focus on the desired three topics
- Assistance in developing a city website for enhanced citizen participation
- Inviting and welcoming citizen input at all times
- Many hours of research and coordination dedicated to looking at Lanesboro’s future.

Community Profile

The Place

Lanesboro is blessed with natural scenic beauty. Towering bluffs surround the town and take center stage with the Root River as it flows through the heart of town. A person walking from one end of Parkway Avenue (“Main Street”) to the other, a distance of less than a mile, is treated to views of beautifully preserved historic buildings, unique shops, art galleries, a year-round professional theater company, outdoor recreation outfitters, a welcoming visitors’ center, a local winery, a public library, many fine restaurants and lodging establishments, a Sons of Norway Lodge, historic bridges on a paved bike trail that extends over 60 miles in both directions, a powerful dam, well-groomed homes and yards, Amish horses and buggies, a lovely city park, a public library, an independent K-12 public school, a public golf course, three well-maintained churches, and, most importantly, lots of very friendly people.

The People

The people of Lanesboro are a vibrant mix of neighbors, visitors, natives and newcomers who are interested in and care about each other. Some residents have lived here all their lives, some grew up here and came back to raise their families and/or start new businesses, and others have moved to town over the past two decades, drawn here by Lanesboro’s quality of life and its unique combination of natural beauty and cultural opportunity. The confluence of diverse, energetic, thoughtful people and diverse, gorgeous, natural landscapes contributes to the intangible, magical quality that sets Lanesboro apart from other small towns.

The Purpose

Lanesboro has undergone tremendous change over the past twenty years. The advent of the bike trail, the growth of a strong arts community, and a palpable entrepreneurial spirit, combined with remarkable public relations success, have contributed to Lanesboro’s evolution from a small farming community into a major tourist attraction. The increased tourism and awareness that come with being named “One of the twenty best dream towns in America” (*Outside Magazine*) also bring challenges dealing with our identity, our infrastructure and the integration of new residents into important volunteer and leadership positions. Lanesboro is a community at a crossroads, seeking to maintain its links to what it has been as it continues to become what it will be.

Housing

20/20 Vision

Lanesboro offers a variety of housing options for residents of all income levels and housing needs. We offer an adequate supply of housing for people at all stages of life: renters, first-time homeowners, move-up buyers, empty nesters/young seniors, and older seniors. We also have an adequate supply of housing for those with special needs. Our increased housing stock enables more people to both work and live in Lanesboro. City programs, such as the Downtown Beautification Campaign, have encouraged residents to renovate and maintain their homes.

Over the past ten years, significant residential growth has taken place in two areas of the city: 1) high-density residential development has occurred in the downtown area to accommodate unassisted living for seniors; 2) a mixture of low- and moderate-density residential development has occurred in the Zenith area. In addition, many vacant lots in established residential areas have now been developed. Residents continue to renovate and improve their housing so that the overall image of Lanesboro's housing stock has greatly improved and Lanesboro's historic character prevails.

Goals

The following five goals are broad statements that reflect Lanesboro's vision for housing. Each goal is accompanied by a number of objectives that mark progress toward the goals.

- **Create a range of housing opportunities and choices to meet the needs of Lanesboro's population at all income levels and stages of life.**
 - √ Create an official Housing Authority to address the ongoing housing needs in Lanesboro, and to provide oversight and recommendations to the Lanesboro City Council.
 - √ Encourage the preservation and enhancement of existing residential properties to provide for the needs of current and future residents.
 - √ Encourage the development of housing that appeals to young adults, seniors and others that may leave Lanesboro or not move here because of the lack of housing choices.
 - √ Promote the development of moderately-high to high-end housing (such as the Zenith subdivision) to meet the existing and future needs of health-care professionals, business executives, entrepreneurs and others who may desire move-up housing.
 - √ Develop and maintain a directory of all available housing in Lanesboro.
- **Provide for the availability of land and space for housing development.**
 - √ Encourage infill housing in areas currently served by public utilities.
 - √ Encourage the creation of mixed-use developments that include housing, employment, shopping and recreational opportunities in a compact, pedestrian-friendly setting. Review and amend zoning ordinances to allow for the above.

- √ Coordinate the effective and cost-efficient extension of infrastructure to the Zenith development area.
- √ Continue to encourage apartments on upper floors of commercial buildings in the downtown area, and other creative solutions to housing.
- √ Support the Church Hill old school housing development, and consider the vacant downtown lots for high-density unassisted housing development.
- **Support and promote financial incentives that provide for homeownership for all income levels.**
 - √ Support and reinvigorate, if necessary, the Lanesboro Housing Development, Inc., to continue to address the needs of low- to moderate-income households.
 - √ Explore the establishment of a Housing Trust Fund to help provide gap financing for lower and middle-income households.
 - √ Apply for Small Cities Grants to assist with maintenance of older housing.
- **Promote beautification efforts, and ensure that all neighborhoods are safe and well served by essential municipal facilities.**
 - √ Encourage and reward strong residential property maintenance and enhancement activities.
 - √ Continue to plan and implement improvements of deteriorated streets, lighting, signage, sidewalks and other infrastructure, and build upon Lanesboro's walkability, easy access to essential services and friendly community spirit.
 - √ Promote neighborhood clean-up programs, and continue the tradition of an annual spring city-wide cleanup.
 - √ Identify blighted properties that are vacant or for sale, and condemn or acquire these properties to clear them for resale/redevelopment.
 - √ Monitor home occupations to ensure that healthy and safe residential conditions are preserved and promoted.
- **Preserve Lanesboro's Historic Character**
 - √ Continue to recognize and publicize the efforts of property owners to beautify their property, and require quality of design and appearance of new housing development.
 - √ Encourage the preservation of historically and architecturally significant structures and districts in Lanesboro, especially the historic residences. Continue to update records and mapping to fully document these resources.
 - √ Reinvigorate the Historical Preservation Society

Economic Development

20/20 Vision

Economic development is thriving in Lanesboro, as diverse business sectors in agriculture, arts, tourism, recreation, manufacturing, and services enjoy year-round profitability and growth. Good paying jobs entice families to remain in or move to our community, and affordable housing is available. Lanesboro is a community that fosters local business initiatives, regional cooperation and clean industry. We treasure our natural resources, and we recognize that a strong natural and cultural environment leads to a strong economic environment.

We enjoy a thriving, attractive, and customer-friendly downtown business district, and successful home-based enterprises in residential areas. We embrace entrepreneurship, and are proud to be known as one of the first communities to provide public city-wide wireless service to residents and visitors.

We are a model for participatory government in which public and private interests work together in community decision-making and planning.

Goals

The following three goals are broad statements that reflect Lanesboro's vision for economic development. Each goal is accompanied by a number of objectives that mark progress toward the goals.

- **Maintain, enhance and promote Lanesboro's "quality of life" as an arts, recreation and tourism destination for residents and visitors.**
 - √ Cherish and promote Lanesboro's friendliness, safety, school, churches, farmers' market, library, parks, beauty, historic character, and walkability.
 - √ Build upon Lanesboro's healthy reputation as a "Fit City", maintaining a clean environment with many recreational offerings, and supporting the maintenance and improvement of the Root River Trail.
 - √ Promote riverfront beautification and development that respects the natural environment.
 - √ Promote Lanesboro's role as the centerpiece of the Bluff Country region to attract new businesses and industries.
 - √ Encourage the vitality of existing arts programming and seek to develop new artistic venues in music, theater and the visual arts.
 - √ Ensure continued support for the continued growth of the Lanesboro Public School and the enrichment of its curriculum.
 - √ Continue to create a consistent, positive image for Lanesboro by promoting property maintenance, improving gateways and providing unified signage.

- √ Recognize and promote the link between residents' quality of life, natural resources, and healthy businesses and industries.
- **Strengthen and sustain existing Lanesboro businesses.**
 - √ Designate the retention and development of existing businesses as a priority of the Lanesboro EDA.
 - √ Support the Lanesboro Area Chamber of Commerce in their efforts to enhance business-to-business communication, promote on-the-job education, strengthen the downtown business district, and publicize the benefits of shopping locally.
 - √ Investigate new opportunities for year-round commercial and recreational activities.
 - √ Promote the historic downtown area as Lanesboro's community center and activity hub.
 - √ Establish regular meetings between city officials and local businesses to exchange ideas and discuss opportunities for economic growth.
 - √ Assess the need for daily public transportation to/from Rochester and other job locations.
- **Support the development of new businesses in Lanesboro.**
 - √ Create and maintain an inventory of public and private lands and buildings that are supported by existing infrastructure and are suitable for the development of desired new businesses and industry.
 - √ Work with the Lanesboro Area Chamber of Commerce to promote Lanesboro as an ideal location for home-based businesses and entrepreneurs.
 - √ Invite businesses and services that Lanesboro deems essential, and/or foster a stronger connection to established businesses in neighboring communities. For example:
 - Hardware store
 - Drug store
 - General/variety store (with clothing for men, women and children)
 - Assisted and unassisted living opportunities for our elderly
 - Coffee shop with book store and Internet access
 - √ Identify new economically and environmentally sustainable uses for the natural resources in the Lanesboro area.
 - √ Implement a state-of-the-art telecommunications infrastructure, including a public wireless service.
 - √ Develop Lanesboro's tourism industry to its full and reasonable potential, and promote events to bring new people to town.

Land Use

20/20 Vision

Lanesboro is known as an environmentally aware community; we believe our sense of place is tied to the natural environment. Lanesboro is blessed with distinctive natural features, a beautiful city park, and ample areas for outdoor recreation. Our land use regulations promote efficient development patterns and low utility costs, while respecting environmental and social concerns. For the past thirteen years, we've strongly promoted redevelopment of deteriorated or vacant properties in areas already served by public utilities and streets. Parkway Avenue North, which in 2007 had at least three vacant lots and several buildings in disrepair, is now a vibrant city center with high-density residential uses integrated into a mixture of commercial uses. We have allowed a limited amount of outward expansion in the Zenith area, primarily for residential development.

The downtown area continues to be the hub of community activity in Lanesboro, providing businesses, services and homes in a clean and pedestrian friendly environment. Adequate parking, consistent signage and additional pedestrian paths linking the riverfront to the downtown area have enhanced downtown business and atmosphere. Restored buildings and murals that celebrate Lanesboro's history have helped make Lanesboro's downtown a tourist attraction as well as a pleasant and interesting place for residents and others to visit.

The Lanesboro Riverfront Plan is being followed, resulting in increased recreational activities along the riverfront and along the Root River Trail. Significant natural areas and open space will be preserved for future generations.

Lanesboro maintains agricultural districts at the outskirts of the City. Logical expansion of development into these areas continues to be reviewed in cooperation with neighboring communities and landowners.

We are proud of our history and culture. Our residents and property owners have worked hard to restore and renovate historic houses and buildings. New development reflects historic styles and patterns. We continue to preserve our reputation as the "Heart of Bluff Country".

Goals

The following four goals are broad statements that reflect Lanesboro's vision for land use. Each goal is accompanied by a number of objectives that mark progress toward the goals.

- **Preserve and enhance Lanesboro's important natural resources and beauty**
 - ✓ Recognize the contributions that our natural resources make to the quality of life in Lanesboro and to the success of our economy.
 - ✓ Develop and implement ordinances that promote smart, thoughtful, logical, sustainable, and environmentally respectful development.
 - ✓ Preserve bluffs, river and riverfront, floodplains, wildlife habitat and other natural features, as well as surface water and groundwater quality.

- √ Protect and promote the synergy of Lanesboro's downtown, industrial, institutional, residential, recreational and natural areas through education of the *Lanesboro 20/20* plan and consistent land use regulation.
- √ Encourage and acknowledge beautification efforts in downtown, parks and neighborhoods, and work with private landowners to clean up contaminated and dilapidated sites that threaten public safety, health and welfare.
- √ Plan and manage the riverfront to maximize its scenic, environmental, cultural, and commercial values, while taking measures to protect the Root River.
- √ Request and support the efforts of the Lanesboro Park Board to inventory, maintain and enhance trees and green spaces in Lanesboro, and to eliminate invasive plant species.
- **Promote infill development within Lanesboro.**
 - √ Inventory vacant and underutilized lands for housing and economic development.
 - √ Encourage development in areas currently served by public utilities and streets; discourage development that would require expensive and inefficient extension of municipal services that only benefit a few users.
 - √ Where feasible, require all new development to be served by municipal utilities.
- **Preserve and build upon Lanesboro's incomparable beauty and historic character.**
 - √ Encourage the preservation of historically and architecturally significant structures and districts in Lanesboro, especially the historic residences. Continue to update records and mapping to fully document these resources.
 - √ Require quality of design and appearance of all renovation and new development.
 - √ Reinvigorate the Lanesboro Historic Preservation Commission, and support its efforts to protect resources that contribute to Lanesboro's historic character.
 - √ Sponsor community events, programs and projects that celebrate the history and culture of Lanesboro, in conjunction with the Lanesboro Public School, Chamber of Commerce, Historic Preservation Commission, arts organizations, churches and other groups.
 - √ Find an effective way to visually represent Lanesboro's plans for the future.
- **Work with farmers and surrounding towns to preserve agriculture uses in mutually agreed areas.**
 - √ Maintain agriculture as a significant economic activity, and recognize the value of farmland as open space near Lanesboro city limits.
 - √ Recommend that no policy should be adopted that would substantially impair or diminish the present uses, values or enjoyment of agricultural land.

Links will be available to the following supplementary materials and resources:

Demographics of Lanesboro (from Fillmore County report and 2000 census)

Lanesboro Comprehensive Plan, 1988 (PDF)

Lanesboro Land Use Plan, 1998 (PDF)

Growing Lanesboro Document (Lanesboro Area Chamber of Commerce)

Don Ward's History of Lanesboro

Survey Results and Verbatims

Smart Growth and Sustainability Guidelines

Lanesboro.com

Lanesboro-mm.gov